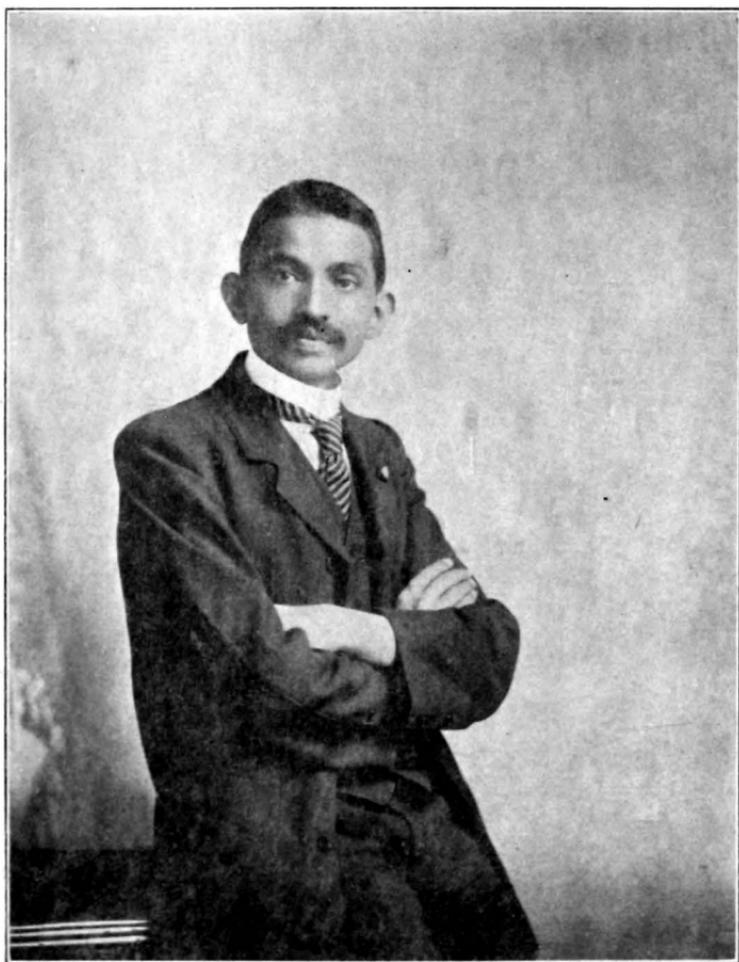


Excerpted from "THE INDIAN REVIEW," November 1929]

GANDHI, THE MAN.



GANDHIJI, AS WE KNEW HIM.

GANDHI, THE MAN.

[The 60th birthday of Mahatma Gandhi was celebrated all over the country with becoming enthusiasm on the 2nd October. Men of all parties, irrespective of political predilections, joined in the celebrations. The Rt Hon Sastri, whose friendship with and esteem for Mr Gandhi, in spite of obvious differences in their outlook, is well-known, presiding over the demonstrations at Madras, paid a fitting tribute to the genius and versatility of the Mahatma. He rightly laid stress on the many striking features of his character, and added "Wherever high character, noble ideals of conduct, utmost piety and resignation to nature are appreciated, Mr Gandhi's name will be known and sincerely revered. The people of thought always recognise in the man, whom we honour to-day, one of those rare souls who are born from time to time to redeem mankind from their sins and failures." In paying tributes to his greatness, said Mr Sastri, the speakers had spoken according to their natures. "To each person," he continued, "some side of Gandhi's nature had appealed most." Thus in the two pen-pictures of the Mahatma that follow, we have two vivid studies of a great personality. Mr and Mrs Polak, who have contributed these special articles at the request of the Editor, have known Mr Gandhi intimately for many years and had worked with him in South Africa. Much has been said and written of the Mahatma as saint and politician, his lofty idealism, his iron will, his contempt of consequences and his heroic virtues, but these intimate studies from two such friends reveal Mr Gandhi in all the simplicity and beauty of a character at once affectionate and thoroughly human, and will doubtless be welcome to readers of "THE INDIAN REVIEW"]

I BY HY S. L. POLAK,

THERE may be more than one opinion as to Gandhi's profundity as a teacher, his insight as a leader, his wisdom as a guide. There can hardly be two opinions as to his merits and qualities as a man, and it is as a man that he would, I imagine, prefer to be judged. Indeed, it is to his human weaknesses and demerits that he always points when he explains to his audience

how and why it is that he fails to reach the goal that he has set himself to, how and why he has failed to satisfy their hopes and his own aspirations. He is Mahatma, because, small, weak, humble as he is, it is instinctively recognised that here we have the type and example of the man striving with all his might to reach the heart of the Divinity within him. Again and again, he implores us and his Creator to take him with all his faults and failings, to recognise his limitations (which he eagerly exposes to our gaze), and yet to measure him by the heights that he would attain with every effort of his sleeping and waking hours. It is thus that we come to realise the majesty of manhood, and because he insists that he is a mere man striving to be perfect even as our Father in Heaven is perfect that we have agreed to call him a great soul. Can any higher tribute be paid by us to one in the flesh? He forces us to understand clearly, what we but dimly perceived before, that Man is a Spirit, and that, in addressing the best in us, it is Spirit calling to Spirit. I doubt if any can make a higher practical contribution to life than this.

It was my own high fortune and privilege to be closely associated with Gandhi when the Mahatmaship was less insisted upon and its glamour did not partly hide him from us, when he was allowed to be among us as a man among men, and then it was that we, who were close to him, could see him as he really is—tender, affectionate, humorous, generous, always eager to serve, never hasty to condemn. Did you feel like shirking? Who readier to do the work than Gandhi? Who made you more ashamed than he by his very unconsciousness of your slackness? Who more dependable in an emergency? Who readier to overlook your faults

—even to ignore them? Who more eager to attribute to you high motives of which you were all too ashamedly unaware? To live with Gandhi was an education in the whole art of manhood. Courage, with him, has stood for something more than a mere physical attribute. Truth has been an urgent and immediate reality, not a vague and misty dream-figure whose proper habitation lies at the bottom of a well. Another's need has been his occasion. He once said to me in mild rebuke "Sunday is no day of rest for the sorrowful or those who suffer." And for him Sunday was, accordingly, a day of harder work than any other.

Gandhi has proved beyond dispute the theory that the best men and the best women combine in themselves the best qualities of each other. No woman could excel him in patience or endurance, none could be more long-suffering. I leave to another pen the task of elaborating this point on the domestic side, and content myself with its application to his public life. Abuse has left him completely unmoved. The difficulty of the task has inhibited him not at all. The faithlessness of fellow-workers has merely stimulated him to greater endurance for them as well as for the others who have stood and waited upon events. Disappointment has but encouraged that invincible patience with which he has taken up the task anew, sure of his goal, certain of the rightness of his cause, with the words "one step enough for me" ever upon his lips.

The true test of leadership is not when the cause is won and the flowing tide carries it to victory, but when the leader of a cause forlorn, facing treachery and disaster, nevertheless keeps his inner

eye upon the distant vision, and conveys something of that vision and his own assurance of its realisation to his colleagues, associates and followers. That is where Gandhi's true greatness as a man lies. To the young man at the threshold of life, in the midst of struggle, all untried, Gandhi has ever been a source of inspiration and encouragement. However wearied by the incidents of the fray, however frequent the disappointments, however hurt by the failures, Gandhi never failed. He understood human weakness, human sorrow, human incapacity, human folly—and made yet one more sacrifice in order to retrieve their consequences. He has been the exemplar of high courage, of chivalry, of hope, of faith. His soul soars high above his human weakness. Strength has come to him and flowed from him because the human man has ever been in close contact with the things of the Spirit.

By perseverance in overcoming, man climbs from the shadows of the lowlands to the bright mountain-tops of the Spirit. For how many of us has Gandhi marked out the way and, alas! how many of us has not this great pioneer left far behind, conscious of our lost opportunities, staggering with fatigue at the pace that he has set, laying down our burdens for just a little rest, taking breath where he has gone serenely forward, doubtful of our capacity to endure, realising that our hero is already acclimatised to higher altitudes than any that we can hope in this life to reach, that there rings in his ears a harmony to which we cannot attune ourselves, that for him there burns a light that is still hidden from us by the intervening distance, that he already converses with those Higher Spirits with whom we cannot yet commune!

II. BY MILLIE GRAHAM POLAK

MOST women love men for such attributes as are usually considered masculine. Yet Mahatma Gandhi has been given the love of many women for his womanliness, for all those qualities that are associated with women—great faith, great fortitude, great devotion, great patience, great tenderness and great sympathy. Women could sense that in him they found a fellow-traveller, one who had passed ahead along the road they, too, were travelling, and could give him an affection deep, pure and untouched by any play of sex-emotion. Women of all kinds have turned to him in perplexity and trouble, and no problem of their lives but could be discussed with absolute frankness, if they desired to do so. They could be sure that some light would be thrown upon their difficulties and the path made to look not too arduous to travel. He seemed to understand how easy it might be for a woman to do what appeared to be evil for love's sake, to sympathise with the soul-surrender which prompted the action, and yet to condemn it unflinchingly and point out that the way of love's service could not be through ministering to anything but the highest. I have known many occasions when a woman has gone to him deeply troubled because she had to acquiesce in some seriously dishonourable action of her husband. Mahatmajī has sympathised with her difficulty, never suggested that she should betray her knowledge of her husband's action, but advised her to use all her love and woman's power to get the man to amend his ways. For himself, he chose the path of the ascetic, yet

eye upon the distant vision, and conveys something of that vision and his own assurance of its realisation to his colleagues, associates and followers. That is where Gandhi's true greatness as a man lies. To the young man at the threshold of life, in the midst of struggle, all untried, Gandhi has ever been a source of inspiration and encouragement. However wearied by the incidents of the fray, however frequent the disappointments, however hurt by the failures, Gandhi never failed. He understood human weakness, human sorrow, human incapacity, human folly—and made yet one more sacrifice in order to retrieve their consequences. He has been the exemplar of high courage, of chivalry, of hope, of faith. His soul soars high above his human weakness. Strength has come to him and flowed from him because the human man has ever been in close contact with the things of the Spirit.

By perseverance in overcoming, man climbs from the shadows of the lowlands to the bright mountain-tops of the Spirit. For how many of us has Gandhi marked out the way and, alas! how many of us has not this great pioneer left far behind, conscious of our lost opportunities, staggering with fatigue at the pace that he has set, laying down our burdens for just a little rest, taking breath where he has gone serenely forward, doubtful of our capacity to endure, realising that our hero is already acclimatised to higher altitudes than any that we can hope in this life to reach, that there rings in his ears a harmony to which we cannot attune ourselves, that for him there burns a light that is still hidden from us by the intervening distance, that he already converses with those Higher Spirits with whom we cannot yet commune!

II. BY MILLIE GRAHAM POLAK

MOST wōmen love men for such attributes as are usually considered masculine. Yet Mahatma Gandhi has been given the love of many women for his womanliness, for all those qualities that are associated with women—great faith, great fortitude, great devotion, great patience, great tenderness and great sympathy. Women could sense that in him they found a fellow-traveller, one who had passed ahead along the road they, too, were travelling, and could give him an affection deep, pure and untouched by any play of sex-emotion. Women of all kinds have turned to him in perplexity and trouble, and no problem of their lives but could be discussed with absolute frankness, if they desired to do so. They could be sure that some light would be thrown upon their difficulties and the path made to look not too arduous to travel. He seemed to understand how easy it might be for a woman to do what appeared to be evil for love's sake, to sympathise with the soul-surrender which prompted the action, and yet to condemn it unflinchingly and point out that the way of love's service could not be through ministering to anything but the highest. I have known many occasions when a woman has gone to him deeply troubled because she had to acquiesce in some seriously dishonourable action of her husband. Mahatmajī has sympathised with her difficulty, never suggested that she should betray her knowledge of her husband's action, but advised her to use all her love and woman's power to get the man to amend his ways. For himself, he chose the path of the ascetic, yet

I have always known him to make allowances for those who could not tread the cold, austere path of denial. If comforts and objects of beauty seemed essential to the woman who discussed such a question with him, he would, had it been in his power, have given them to her, but, at the same time, he would try and persuade her to seek beauty in the things of the spirit and not to identify herself with the things of the world. Perhaps, sometimes, he did not quite realise that so many women, while having great possessions, can yet stand outside of them. So often the woman herself does not realise it until she is called upon to give them up. Then she knows they have very little real meaning to her, neither are they the things that matter most.

I often see in imagination Mahatmaji, as I frequently saw him in South Africa, walking up and down a room with a young child in his arms, soothing it in the almost unconscious way a woman does, and, at the same time, discussing with the utmost clearness pressing political questions, communal strife, or abstract problems in philosophy; and children instinctively knew this side of his character, they would nestle up to him, sure of the comfort they desired. In some ways I have thought it was easier for him to deal with the needs of young children than those of adolescence, with its warring emotions, its struggle for liberty and self-expression, and its developing mind. During that period in the life of the developing individual he did not so easily realise the strength of the storms that can sweep reason aside, and when, as it unfortunately sometimes happened, he was deceived by the youth around him, it was because in his own great simplicity he did not appreciate the amazing complexity of the character of

youth He saw so clearly the straight path that should be trod, that he seemed to find it somewhat difficult to deal with the dual nature that becomes apparent during those years when one passes from childhood into adulthood When, however, the individual had taken upon himself his adult character, then again, for Mahatmaji, contact and understanding were once more easy and could be complete

Another of the many pictures of life in South Africa arises clearly in my mind It was during the early years of life in Phoenix Mahatmaji had at this time come to definite conclusions about sex-abstinence He had written and spoken on the subject very decisively I had had several discussions with him about the continuance of human life on this planet, and had, on one occasion, remarked that he must surely consider that God was wrong in having created men and women with their senses and emotions, since, were they to accept and adopt Mahatmaji's dictum, then God's expression through creation would cease, self-control, I contended, being the goal of developed humanity and not the denial of God's method of peopling the world Very soon after this conversation, one of the members of the little settlement at Phoenix gave birth to a child I purposely refrained from speaking of the matter when I visited Phoenix two or three days later I thought that perhaps Mahatmaji might feel the fact displeasing After a short time, and having talked of other things, he said in a surprised voice "You have not asked about the mother and babe Do you not want to see them?" He then came with me to see the baby and talked in a quiet, joyous way to the mother, and I realised in a flash that, even as a woman

does, he differentiated between abstract principles and human needs and affections

Only once have I known him fail to comprehend the deep emotions of a woman's life, and that was in not understanding the depth of absolute sorrow into which a woman, bereft of her dearly beloved by death, was plunged. Perhaps it was the one experience that he had not until then fully entered into, and he could not, therefore, realise how sick the soul of such a woman could be. Or it may have been that his belief in woman's consciousness of her touch with the All Father precluded him from knowing that women also have their periods of standing alone in an empty universe, where God has ceased to be and man is a vanishing shadow.